



Committee and Date

Economy and Environment
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee

23 April 2024

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2024

In the Council Chamber, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, SY2 6ND

Responsible Officer: Amanda Holyoak

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Present

Councillors Joyce Barrow (Chair) Steve Davenport (Vice Chair), Nick Bardsley (substitute member) Garry Burchett, Rosemary Dartnall, Julian Dean, Roger Evans, Nick Hignett, Pamela Moseley and Ed Potter, David Vasmer (substitute member)

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Rob Wilson. His substitute was Councillor David Vasmer.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Paul Wynn. His substitute was Councillor Nick Bardsley.

2 Disclosable Interests

None were declared.

3 Public Question Time

There were no public questions

4 Member Question Time

There were no member questions.

5 Call In - Sports Village Transformation

The Chair welcomed the committee members and Robert Macey, Portfolio Holder for Digital and Culture, and officers Jane Trethewey, Assistant Director Homes and Communities and Peter Gilbertson, Senior Project Management Officer, to the meeting.

She explained the purpose of the meeting which had been convened to consider the call-in submitted by The Liberal Democrat Group Leader on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group in respect of the Cabinet decision of 17 January 2024 regarding Shrewsbury Sports Village Transformation. She referred to the decisions available to the committee in

relation to call in and the procedure that would be followed, set out in appendix 4 to the report.

The Chair invited the Liberal Democrat Group Leader to explain the reasons for the call in of the decision. He said that he was not against the consultation per se, but against the consultation that had been agreed by Cabinet because of the phraseology within it. He asked that the content of the questionnaire be referred back to Cabinet with recommendations for amendment as his Group felt that the decision made had been flawed due to concerns related to :

- The questionnaire – which did not reflect the lengthy debate on swimming pool facilities in Shrewsbury, stretching back over 13 years and previous decisions made;
- Previous consultations undertaken - which had returned results significantly favouring the Quarry Swimming pool over the Sports Village for development of new swimming facilities had been ignored;
- 600 submissions to the consultation on swimming facilities held in 2016 had been rejected as they had been submitted using the same device in one household;
- The reason the Quarry swimming facilities were in a poor condition was due to lack of maintenance over significant amount of time;
- The possibility of a new pool in the Riverside location had not even been considered.

The Chair asked if there were any questions for Councillor Evans at this stage of the meeting and as there were none, went on to ask the Assistant Director, Homes and Communities and Portfolio Holder for Digital and Culture to explain the background to the decision made and respond to the call in.

The Assistant Director explained that:

- The Cabinet decision had been purely to consult on the proposals for a pool to be added to the existing facilities at Shrewsbury Sports Village;
- No decision had been made in relation to the Quarry Pool, nothing had been ruled in or out, and the consultation on proposals for the Sports Village did not rule out any proposals for the Quarry Pool in future;
- In order to progress with a two site pool solution in Shrewsbury it would only be possible to develop one at a time – any development of facilities at the Quarry pool site would require its closure over a lengthy period, leaving Shrewsbury with no swimming provision during that time. This was the reason for progressing with the consultation solely on proposed facilities at the Sports Village site, ahead of a decision being made on the Quarry.

The Portfolio Holder reiterated that no decision at all had been made on the Quarry Swimming Pool and that the consultation was designed only to obtain views on proposals for new facilities at the Sports Village site.

Committee members were invited to ask any questions of officers and the Portfolio Holder.

A member of the committee said the financial circumstances the council found itself in meant that the likelihood of having two pool locations in Shrewsbury into the future was unlikely. He felt that the consultation therefore was in effect related to closure of the

Quarry Pool. The Call-in had been made as it was felt that the consultation should have included an option to ask if people felt a refurbished or rebuilt pool was needed in Shrewsbury Town Centre - as previous consultations had identified the town centre as the favoured location for swimming facilities.

Officers again reiterated that no decision had been made in relation to the Quarry site, and that if it were to be refurbished or rebuilt ahead of a Sports Village facility then Shrewsbury would be left without any swimming facilities at all for a lengthy period of time. In addition, as the Quarry pool at 55 years old was at end of life, the risk of further serious maintenance issues was high which could result in temporary or long-term closure, leaving the town without any facilities.

Locating a pool at the Smithfield development in the town centre had never been raised previously; would represent a completely new direction; and was unlikely to be feasible due to flood risk, and financial viability due to the footprint which would be required. Progressing this as an option would delay decision making for many years.

The Chair noted that members of the Shropshire Amateur Swimming Association, who had come to watch the meeting, were in support of the proposals for the Sports Village.

A Committee member was critical of how the results of previous consultations in relation to swimming facilities had been used and raised a concern regarding the rejection of a large number of responses to a previous consultation, as a result of another response having been already submitted from the same device in a household, which he said potentially had skewed results.

Members also raised points related to: transport issues, the number of gyms already available in the area; positive energy efficient measures for a pool at the sports village; reasons an 8 lane pool had been proposed; the need to support the viability of the Sports Village; the current lifespan, viability and future of the Quarry Pool location; and the need to avoid a situation whereby there were no swimming facilities at all available in Shrewsbury.

The Chair reminded all present that the discussion must focus on the exploration of the reasons as set out in the call in, which was, whether the current consultation on proposed swimming facilities to be added to the Sports Village site was flawed.

The Portfolio Holder said he wished to make it categorically clear that the Quarry Pool had only been referenced in the report to the committee to provide a context for the prioritisation of provision of facilities at the Sports Village location. There was a need to move quickly as any delays would lead to higher costs due to pressures of inflation on construction costs.

A member asked about the issue raised regarding rejection of a large number of responses to a previous questionnaire, as multiple responses could not be made from the same household. It seemed reasonable for two or three people to respond from the same household. The Assistant Director said that she believed that this was fairly standard methodology but said she would look into this issue.

It was confirmed that any future proposals related to the Quarry Swimming Pool would be subject to discussion and consultation.

It was proposed and seconded that the matter be referred back to Cabinet for the reasons set out in the call in the notice and during the meeting. On being put to the vote, this proposal fell.

The Portfolio Holder and Assistant Director were then asked that they clarify the position when the consultation was released with regard to multiple responses from the same household, and also make it clear that the consultation and proposals had no relation to future plans for the Quarry Pool. It was confirmed that they would be able to do this without reference back to Cabinet.

This was proposed and seconded and following a vote it was

RESOLVED:

That the Committee should take no further action and that the Assistant Director and Portfolio Holder ensure that once the consultation is issued that information will be provided so that it is very clear that the consultation is only in relation to proposals for the Sports Village, did not concern future plans for the Quarry Pool, which would be dealt with separately at a later date, and that it also be made very clear, if it remained the case, that multiple responses from the same device would not be accepted.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: